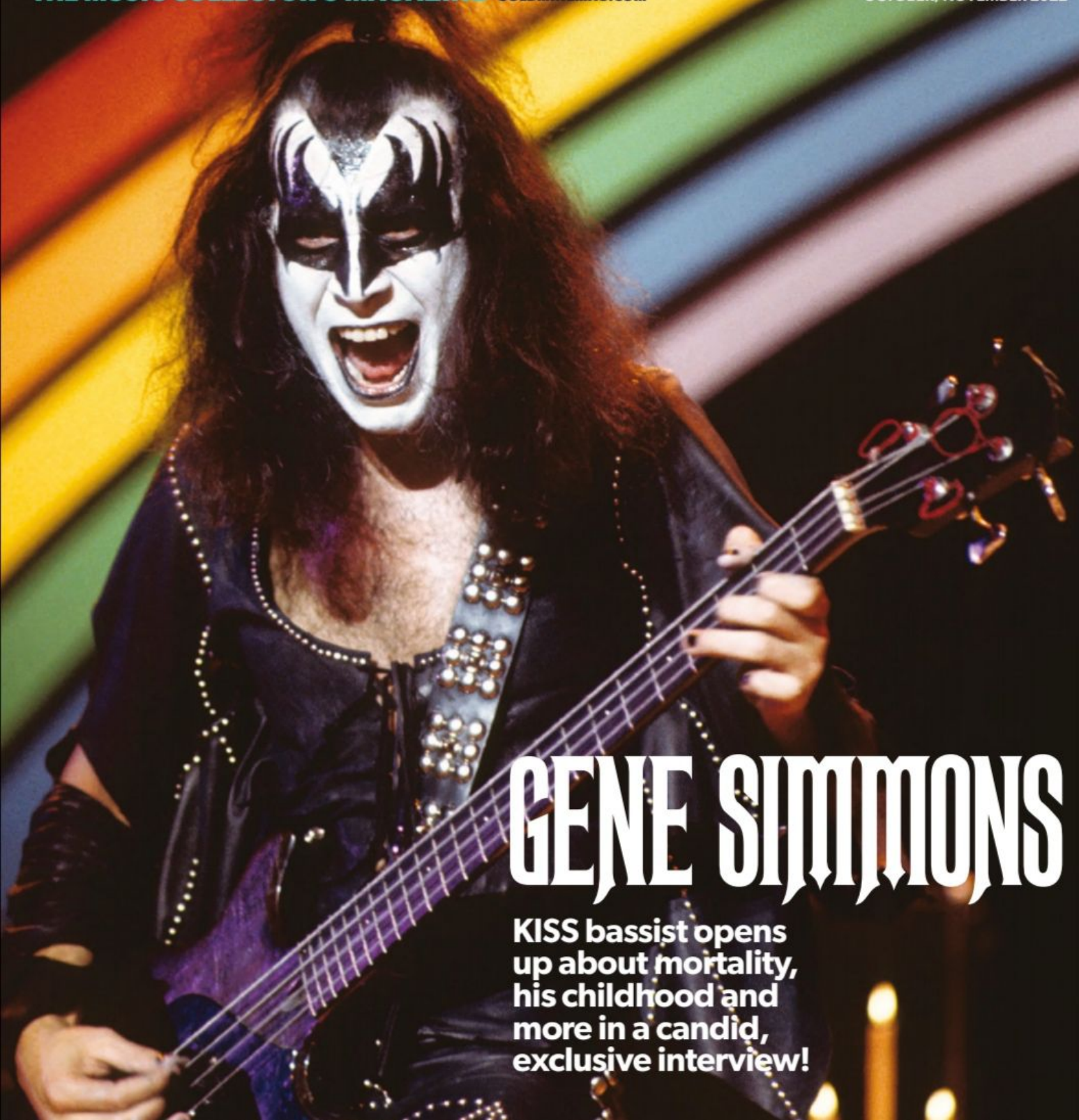


+ THE ROLLING STONES | JULIAN LENNON | THE DOORS | ANN WILSON

GOLDmine

THE MUSIC COLLECTOR'S MAGAZINE GOLDMINEMAG.COM

OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2022



GENE SIMMONS

**KISS bassist opens
up about mortality,
his childhood and
more in a candid,
exclusive interview!**

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duck. I've
hardly had any
friends. I never
really hung out.**
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GETS CANDID
ABOUT HIMSELF
AND THE
FUTURE

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHILIP COSTELLO/REDFERNS

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GOLDMINE

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This issue of *Goldmine* gives the reader three different covers, randomly distributed to subscribers and newsstands: **The Rolling Stones**, **Gene Simmons** and **KISS**. The issue's collector's editions will be available only in the Goldmine store at *Shop.GoldmineMag.com* for a limited time and limited number of 200 copies (bottom row of covers shown above). Like most of our collector's editions, each one has an alternate cover and exclusive photos (numbered 8x10" professional prints suited for framing) in a sleek slipcase. The Rolling Stones edition will have several photos from Stones aficionado Ivor Levene, while the KISS edition will showcase wonderfully rare photos from the great veteran rock photographer Bob Alford.

— Patrick Prince
Editor

EXTRA CONTENT

THE GOLDMINE PODCAST

Listen several times a month, as musicians and collectors discuss music. Go to www.goldminemag.com/page/podcasts. Also available on iTunes, Amazon Music, Pandora, iHeartRadio and Spotify.


RECENT PODCAST HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Record Store Recon** visits a record store every print issue, afterward the anonymous Dr. Disc talks about it in more detail on a podcast episode.
- Ask yourself: Are there really any bad **Beatles songs**? If you had to pick your least favorite (worst) songs, what would they be? Two Goldmine staffers take on the difficult task of picking at least three songs each; the songs that they promptly skip over to listen to the next Fab Four track.

THE GOLDMINE RADIO HOUR

Hear the music from the latest issue of *Goldmine*, every Sunday at 7 p.m. ET with hosts Ronald Webb and editor Patrick Prince at www.cygnusradio.com

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ROCK STAR
GENE SIMMONS
OPENS UP ABOUT
HIS PERSONAL
LIFE AS WELL
AS HIS LONG-
TERM VISION
FOR **KISS** AND
OTHER BUSINESS
VENTURES.

BY **KEN SHARP**

Bassist Gene Simmons
performs with Kiss
onstage at the Civic
Auditorium on May 31,
1974 in Long Beach,
California.

THE PSYCHE OF GENE SIMMONS

While touring Europe on KISS' farewell jaunt, "The End of the Road" tour, Gene Simmons clearly has his eye toward the future. As the band wind down, Simmons, a self-described serial entrepreneur, has already proactively launched shopgenesimmons.com, a venture centered around merch sporting logo permutations of his money bag trademark. Simmons also manages genesimmonsauctions.com and Gene Simmons KISS World in Las Vegas, culling The Demon's vast personal collection of KISS memorabilia and one-of-a-kind personal items.

In the following *Goldmine* chat, we discuss these new ventures but also delve deeper into the psyche of Simmons touching upon his teenage years, KISS' farewell tour and mortality.

GOLDMINE: *For KISS' "End of the Road" tour, at a show I saw, I don't think I've ever seen Paul smile so much. It really feels like there's a sense within the band that now the end is coming and let's enjoy every moment on that stage but in a more tangibly deeper way. Is that a feeling happening with you?*

GENE SIMMONS: Yeah. Considering we started in '73 and we're in the year 2022 now and probably by 2024 we'll be done. That's enough. 50 years is enough for anybody. And also out of respect and love for the fans, you want to get off the stage while the getting is good; you've got to have a sense of pride and know when it's time. You don't want to be some of the champions of all time who stayed in the ring too long and got knocked out. It's

"quit while you're on top." Of course, everything comes to an end at some point, and you're lucky and blessed if that last lap around the track is your victory lap. You celebrate the past. But of course, that thing is going to be over at some point in your life. You've got to leave home. You've got to leave mom and dad and go off on your own and start that next chapter. And by the way, at some point, life itself is going to be over.

GM: *Take us into what your bedroom was like as a teenager: What would we have seen?*

GS: I was living at my mother's house, so I put nothing on the walls, nothing. At about 13, 14, I was learning to play just by watching people's hands

on guitar. My mother bought me an SG standard Gibson, and I remember thinking, Oh, my God, my fingers are killing me. How can anybody play this? But slowly I started to play a C chord and then a G chord and so on. So there was nothing on my wall. I was more fascinated by publishing my own fanzine.

GM: *What did you learn from doing your own fanzines?*

GS: The biggest lesson learned doing my own fanzines was vision. Vision is an interesting idea, and I don't mean to be able to see something in front of you. That's easy, everybody can do that. To have vision is to see something that's not there. You know who had vision? Bugsy Siegel. He went to a desert and

actually saw a place — never mind the fact that he was a criminal, that has nothing to do with it. He actually landed in the desert and he said, “Yeah, right here, this is where the city is gonna be. It’s gonna be a gambling city. People are going to come from all over the world to see it.” That’s vision. And that became Las Vegas. And when he first went there, there was nothing, not even worms for buzzards.

Gene Simmons,
Ace Frehley and
Paul Stanley of
Kiss perform
onstage circa 1974.

And vision means KISS. It means before groups thought of trademarks and logos and faces and icons and before all these toys. But before this happens you have to have this kind of vision, this kind of almost religious vision. I’ve heard Christians talk about this, and I don’t buy it. But I don’t downgrade or degrade their vision of it, this kind of, “I know there’s this gateway to heaven.”

You see the stars in their eyes. I love that part. Passion and vision. And that’s what I learned because at the same time I was doing the fanzines everybody in class thought I was a geek, but they were small-minded. I was getting letters from grown people, 20, 30 or 40 years old, saying what I was doing was great. To get letters from around the world saying you’re great, it tells you you’re



good. You're good when you're 13 and get a postcard from Stan Lee, which I still have, saying, "Congratulations, you're very talented, keep going." It was signed by him, too; someone who you thought lived in the clouds. My fanzines apparently were so good that the University of Wisconsin put it into their time capsule as examples of 20th century amateur press.



GM: Did you have a typewriter in your room?

GS: I had typewriters, a printing press, all kinds of stuff. Did it all myself.

GM: Did you have a stereo in your bedroom?

GS: No, just a radio. The stereo was in the living room. And that's where I played my Chubby Checker records and all kinds of other stuff. This was pre-Beatles. I never bought records. I hardly ever bought anything. I just saved money. My old school chum and later Wicked Lester bandmate, Stephen Coronel, turned me onto a lot of music, things like Cream, The Jeff Beck Group, Mitch Ryder and The Detroit Wheels, The Ventures. I was aware of Jimi Hendrix, and clearly the guitar was the star there. Pragmatism always ruled in my life. I looked around and everyone was trying to be a lead guitarist or rhythm guitarist, and I didn't see anyone trying to be a bassist. So, I figured if I wanted to be in a band, maybe I'll pick up bass. I had no training and just tried to follow the chords and play the root notes. Because my mind tends to wander, I started playing melody on the bass guitar. So the first sense of an important bassist was Paul McCartney, and that was the right first introduction to it. He didn't play bass the way bass players play bass. He was a guitar player initially. Paul switched to bass much later on. Often the bass didn't have much to do melodically or rhythmically with either the guitar or the drums. I was initially aware immediately of how unique it was to do a song like "Day Tripper" or "Taxman" or lots of other Beatles songs where the bass and the guitar did riffs together, almost the way horns played together.

GM: Were you collecting comic books then? Would we have found a stack of comic books in your room?

GS: I probably had a thousand comic books. All the first issues, all the Marvels, all that stuff and of course, one year when I didn't do well in school, my mother threw out all the comics. (laughs) Even back then, when I showed my mother how much these comic books were going for, she said, "Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't know all that." So when I was at my mother's house, I didn't put anything up on the walls, that was forbidden. As soon as I

// I'm not afraid of death unless a car is coming straight into your face. You kind of go, 'Oh my God!' But that's just instinct. //

— GENE SIMMONS

was 22 or 23, I rented out a one bedroom from a couple. That was the first place I actually paid rent. It was in Brooklyn. By then I met Paul (Stanley), and we would religiously buy *Melody Maker* and the other British music magazines, and often there were full-page ads. I remember liking one ad for Silverhead, a band led by Michael Des Barres, that was on my wall, along with God knows how many other bands, just because I like the style of the English bands. And wouldn't you know it, within a year and a half, Silverhead was opening up for KISS.

GM: Who was your best friend growing up, and who is your best friend today?

GS: I'm a strange duck. I've hardly had any friends. I never really hung out. I never drank, so that was out. I wouldn't hang out on street corners and smoke cigarettes and all that stuff. I was just busy doing what I wanted to do and chasing girls. So that didn't leave time for friends. I didn't go to baseball games. I kept reading about what friends do. They hang out with each other. They call each other, "Hey, I need a favor." I never had any of that. But when I was doing a project and I needed somebody to do the project with, then you have somebody to work with and have a social thing. So in the beginning, I worked with a guy named Seth Dogramajian. We were busy doing cool stuff with a band. He was in The Missing Links, which became The Lynx. We were in a band together, and then we started in fanzines together.

// You don't want to be some of the champions of all time who stayed in the ring too long and got knocked out. It's quit while you're on top. //

— GENE SIMMONS

GM: So if you had to pick one guy as a best friend from your teenage years, it'd be Seth?

GS: Yeah, he's passed, unfortunately.

GM: How about later in life?

GS: Through school and through college, I had no friends, I was just chasing girls and doing stuff at work. But actually I had a friend — Steve Coronel. Steve and I were in a band together by the time I was in 7th or 8th grade. The band was called the Long Island Sounds. It was actually also called Love Bag, which we thought was dangerous. That means prophylactic. We shared a love of music. He liked Mitch Ryder and the Detroit Wheels, and so did I and we talked about another band he also liked called The Ventures, and then he started listening to the British guitar players. But we were in a band together. He was actually the original guitar player in Wicked Lester. He was a friend when we'd get together pretty much only because of the band. When the band wasn't doing anything, I wouldn't go to movies with guys or hang out.

GM: What's the source of that insular nature where you really didn't have a need to connect with people?

GS: Even today, as I sit here, other than Paul, and we only get together when we do stuff with the band. How do I say this without sounding inhuman? I don't have friends. Yeah, if friends means, "Gee, I don't know what I'm going to do this afternoon. Hey, you want to come over and

hang out?" I don't hang out. "I've never hung out. I'm more interested in what I want to do, and I don't want to pretend that I'm interested in what you want to do because I'm not."

GM: Gene, your parents divorced when you were young. Looking back, how did that loss of your father impact on the person you became?

GS: At about seven or so, my mother was forced to go out and work six days a week, and I woke up in the middle of the night and my mother wasn't there. We were living in a one bedroom in Israel, and I remember being scared and just crying and crying and also scared and alone and sad that nobody's around. "I'm here alone." I remember I cried so much that I cried myself to sleep. And the next day the sun came up and my mother was there and everything was back to normal. And without being able to verbalize it, I may have thought that was a waste of time. That was wasted energy. And maybe, without having my father as a father figure, I learned to depend on myself early on.

GM: After *KISS* made it, despite having no contact with your father for many years, you took care of him by buying him a home. He would write you letters, but you never responded. Do you have any regrets that you didn't connect with him? And if you did connect with him today, what questions would you ask him?

GS: Yes and no. I thought I had a responsibility regardless of providing for my father, especially because I could. He had a number of wives afterwards, and that's fine. Everybody should try to be happy anyway they can, and he had quite a few kids with other wives, and that's OK, too. I've since grown close to my half sisters and brother. He was a busy guy so I had a responsibility. I believed in buying him a house, sending him money and stuff like that. But I didn't believe I had the responsibility of having a social relationship.

GM: So you never responded to him ever?

GS: No, I did not.

GM: Or a phone call?

GS: No. My mother flew over to Israel 25 separate times to visit my father and brought him money and all that, despite the fact that he had other wives there. My

mother didn't want to break up his marriages or anything. But she would go over to visit him; that was her first great love. She wanted to make sure he was OK. She would go and visit him with his children and his wife. My mother, I think, was hurt forever. My father was just sort of a different kind of guy. He was always a big guy. I thought he may have been six (foot) nine and partly because of that, quite a few women were attracted to that.

GM: Hypothetically, if he still was alive and he knocks on your door, what would you want to ask him about?

GS: Well, what are you going to do? You have to consider it's a different time. Brand new country, tough to get a job. By and large, if you take a look at the statistics, men leave their families and their children, they just get up when it gets too hard and they check out.

GM: And without getting too psychological, I think that's why you were very reluctant to marry the love of your life, Shannon, for so long, because probably in the back of your mind, you're thinking my dad left my mother and perhaps you were thinking you were going to do that, too.

GS: You know when somebody says, "bingo"? That's precisely it, and I verbalized it many times. I didn't want to get married. I told Shannon, "I'm never going to marry you. If you agree, sign here. I don't want kids. I don't want to do that." She said, "Why don't you want to do that?" "Well, I don't want to turn into my father."

GM: And to your credit, you probably surprised yourself, you didn't.

GS: No, I didn't.

GM: There's a *Faces* song called "Ooh La La," which has a really smart lyric: "I wish that I knew what I know now when I was younger." What are the things you wish you did know when you were younger that would have made your life a little easier or enhanced your understanding of people or just your acceptance of yourself?

GS: That it didn't matter what I thought I knew, and it didn't matter what I knew. You still have to wade through the jungle by yourself. All the knowledge in the world, or no knowledge at all, doesn't prepare you for life because there's no one journey, there's no one road.



Ace Frehley, Peter Criss, Paul Stanley and Gene Simmons pose for a portrait session in January 1975 in Los Angeles, California.

GM: *So what do you wish you knew, though, back when you were younger?*

GS: It's an interesting question. I really don't have regrets because you live and you learn. I don't want to quote Alanis Morissette, but the life experience itself is going to be the best teacher. If you don't learn from your mistakes, then that's on you.

GM: *You're closer to the finish of life than the beginning. How often do you think about your own mortality and what's your philosophy about death?*

GS: I'd be a complete asshole, certainly more than I am now, if I wasn't grateful for this amazing life. I mean, if it ended today, I know what my tombstone would say. It would say, "Thank you and good night." What more could you hope for? So I'm not afraid of death unless a car is coming straight into your face. You kind of go, "Oh my God!" But that's just instinct.

GM: *Do you think about death much more now?*

GS: I do, but only in terms of pragmatism, which is how up to date is the will. I want to make sure there are no taxes,

there are no liens, there's no nothing so that my family and my kids get taken care of, just sort of pragmatic taking care of business.

GM: *What's your belief system in what happens when you die?*

GS: I'm OK if there's a heaven and a God. I'm OK with it. I'm also OK if there's nothing.

GM: *What do you lean towards?*

GS: I lean towards nothing. My question is, if we get an afterlife, do mosquitoes? Maybe my mother's sort of wise statement about every day above ground is a good day, and that's it.

GM: *You've been part of show business for almost 50 years. You've met your share of celebrities and stars, and certainly people that you really admired. Who are the one or two people that you did get to meet where even Gene Simmons was at a loss for words?*

GS: The Dalai Lama. We were at an event where this entity sent hearing aids to kids around the world who never had the ability to hear, so it changed their life right away. And his Holiness, which is

how people refer to the Dalai Lama, was taking questions, we took photos together, and he was very kind. He did my hand gesture and all that. But one thing that was interesting was he was curious. He was curious about people, what their experiences were. Somebody said, "You have religious beliefs. What happens if you find that science proves that your belief is wrong?" And he said that you have to change your belief, which I've never heard any religious figure cop to and admit. If you find some way to prove that what you believe is false, do you still adhere to it or do you change your belief? And he said, you've got to change your belief.

GM: *Ballsy is one way to describe you. It still blows my mind you had the balls to ask Bob Dylan to co-write a song with you and it worked.*

GS: Yes, we co-wrote the song "Waiting for the Morning Light," which appears on my solo album, *Asshole*. I picked up the phone and said, "Bob, we've only run into each once or twice socially. I've always admired you, and it would mean the world to me to write a song with you."

And he said, "Sure." He came over, we sat down with acoustic guitars, and Bob started playing some chord changes. I immediately started humming this melody. I remember I was wearing little shorts because it was a really hot day, and my guesthouse used to be a farmhouse, so there was no air conditioning. I had a little tape recorder and two acoustic guitars, and we sat around and it was very matter of fact. I had never (formally) met Bob, never spoken to him before. But we connected very quickly. I was secretly awed, but obviously thankful he would even give me the time of day, much less come to my house to write a song with me. At the end of the day, I didn't know what we had, but I recorded the whole thing. A few weeks went by, I had the arrangement down, I went into the studio with Tommy Thayer and two other guys and demoed it. All I had were nonsensical lyrics. Bob came down to check it out in the overdubbing stages. He liked it a lot. It had a kind of Traveling Wilburys sound to it. Then I ran into Bob when we were on tour. I told him, "I have this track,

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 98]

Creatures of the Night, Super Deluxe Edition

Another KISS release to be excited about: A Super Deluxe edition of the *Creatures of the Night* album, slated for release later this year, packed with rarities, live tracks and tons of ephemera. Forty years on, what makes *Creatures* a special record in the band's canon?

"*Creatures* was a transitional, back to basics record for us," says Gene Simmons. "After having lost both Ace (though his image appears

on the album cover), and Peter, we decided to get back to guitars and drums. And with Eric Carr on drums, I thought a bigger drum sound was long overdue, especially on "I Love It Loud." With Ace and Peter no longer in the band, we had yet to settle on a new lead guitarist, so we used a few different talented lead guitarists, eventually settling on Vinnie Vincent, a talented songwriter and lead guitarist.

"But worth noting, even before he was in the band, there were behavioral and personality problems, which eventually rose to the surface, which is a shame, because he actually had the goods. But in my view, left to his own devices, his lead guitar playing just sounded like an angry bee. So, in a very real way, *Creatures* signaled the end of the old KISS and the beginning and rebirth of the new heavier rockin' KISS."



VINTAGE SHOT

PHOTO BY MARK WEISS
GENE SIMMONS
KISS, 1977

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KISS SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY



CASABLANCA

- 812770 Dynasty 1983 \$25.00 Reissue
- 822780 Alive! 1984 \$25.00 Reissue
- 822781 Alive II 1984 \$25.00 Reissue
- 824146 Kiss 1984 \$25.00 Reissue
- 824147 Hotter Than Hell 1984 \$25.00 Reissue
- 824148 Dressed to Kill 1984 \$25.00 Reissue
- 824149 Destroyer 1984 \$25.00 Reissue
- 824150 Rock and Roll Over 1984 \$25.00 Reissue
- 824151 Love Gun 1984 \$25.00 Reissue
- 824153 Music from The Elder 1984 \$25.00 Reissue
- 824154 Creatures of the Night 1984 \$25.00 Reissue; features band without its makeup on cover
- 824154 Creatures of the Night 1994 \$60.00 Reissue; glow-in-the-dark vinyl; gatefold edition; makeup cover restored
- 824155 Double Platinum 1984 \$25.00 Reissue
- 826242 Unmasked 1985 \$30.00 Reissue
- (no cat) Kiss '76 Special Kiss Tour Album 1976 \$175.00 Special four-track sampler
- NB 9001 Kiss 1974 \$60.00 Second Warner Bros.-distributed version DOES have "Kissin' Time" on Side 2 (RE-1 on label)
- NB 9001 Kiss 1974 \$125.00 First Warner Bros.-distributed version does NOT have "Kissin' Time"
- NB 20128 A Taste of Platinum 1978 \$60.00 Promo-only sampler from Double Platinum
- NB 20137 Peter Criss, Ace Frehley, Gene Simmons, Paul Stanley 1978 \$80.00 Promo-only sampler from the band's solo albums
- NBLP 737 Rock and Roll Over Special Edition 1977 \$150.00 Five-track sampler from the LP
- NBLP 7001 Kiss 1974 \$30.00 All renumbered versions have "Kissin' Time"; dark blue label
- NBLP 7001 Kiss 1976 \$30.00 Tan label with desert scene, "Casablanca" label
- NBLP 7001 Kiss 1977 \$25.00 Tan label with desert scene, "Casablanca Record and FilmWorks" label
- NBLP 7006 Hotter Than Hell 1974 \$30.00 Dark blue label
- NBLP 7006 Hotter Than Hell 1976 \$30.00 Tan label with desert scene, "Casablanca" label
- NBLP 7006 Hotter Than Hell 1977 \$25.00 Tan label with desert scene, "Casablanca Record and FilmWorks" label
- NBLP 7016 Dressed to Kill 1975 \$30.00 Dark blue label
- NBLP 7016 Dressed to Kill 1976 \$30.00 Tan label with desert scene, "Casablanca" label
- NBLP 7016 Dressed to Kill 1977 \$25.00 Tan label with desert scene, "Casablanca Record and FilmWorks" label
- NBLP 7020 Alive! 1975 \$50.00 Dark blue labels; with booklet

- NBLP 7020 Alive! 1976 \$25.00 Tan labels with desert scene, "Casablanca" label
- NBLP 7020 Alive! 1977 \$30.00 Tan labels with desert scene, "Casablanca Record and FilmWorks" label
- NBLP 7025 Destroyer 1976 \$30.00 Tan label with desert scene, "Casablanca" label
- NBLP 7025 Destroyer 1976 \$30.00 Dark blue label
- NBLP 7025 Destroyer 1977 \$25.00 Tan label with desert scene, "Casablanca Record and FilmWorks" label
- NBLP 7032 The Originals 1976 175.00 Tan label with desert scene, "Casablanca" label; without extras
- NBLP 7032 The Originals 1976 300.00 Tan label with desert scene, "Casablanca" label; with booklet, six Kiss cards, a Kiss Army sticker
- NBLP 7032 The Originals 1977 \$60.00 Tan label with desert scene, "Casablanca Record and FilmWorks" label; "Second Printing" on cover; without extras
- NBLP 7032 The Originals 1977 175.00 Tan label with desert scene, "Casablanca Record and FilmWorks" label; "Second Printing" on cover; with extras listed above
- NBLP 7037 Rock and Roll Over 1976 \$25.00 Tan label with desert scene, "Casablanca" label; comes with sticker and Kiss Army paraphernalia order form
- NBLP 7037 Rock and Roll Over 1977 \$25.00 Tan label with desert scene, "Casablanca Record and FilmWorks" label, with inserts
- NBLP 7057 Love Gun 1977 \$25.00 Without inserts
- NBLP 7057 Love Gun 1977 \$50.00 with "Hot Goods from the Supply Depot" order form, unpunched-out cardboard gun and "Bang!" sticker. All items intact.
- NBLP 7076 Alive II 1977 \$30.00 Without inserts
- NBLP 7076 Alive II 1977 \$80.00 With 8-page booklet, tattoo insert and "Combat Gear" order form; back cover contents are correct
- NBLP 7076 Alive II 1977 \$1,000.00 With 8-page booklet, tattoo insert and "Combat Gear" order form; back cover lists three tracks — "Take Me," "Hooligan" and "Do You Love Me" — that were not included on the record; no records with these tracks were made; perhaps as few as 50 copies of this cover were made.
- NBLP 7100 Double Platinum 1978 \$30.00 Without inserts
- NBLP 7100 Double Platinum 1978 \$50.00 With "platinum award" cardboard insert and "Double Platinum Kiss Gear" order form
- NBLP 7152 Dynasty 1979 \$25.00 With neither poster nor order form
- NBLP 7152 Dynasty 1979 \$30.00 With poster and merchandise order form

- NBLP 7225 Kiss Unmasked 1980 \$25.00 With poster and "Kiss Essential Gear" order form
- NBLP 7225 Kiss Unmasked 1980 \$25.00 With neither poster nor order form
- NBLP 7261 Music from The Elder 1981 \$30.00 Various editions have paper or plastic innersleeves, lyric sheets, even incorrect track listings on the back cover; no difference in value is noted between variations.
- NBLP 7270 Creatures of the Night 1982 \$50.00 Original version has band with makeup

DIR BROADCASTING

- (no cat) Kiss/Motley Crue - The Best of the Biscuit 1984 \$300.00
- (no cat) Kiss/Heaven - King Biscuit Flour Hour 1984 \$100.00

MERCURY

- 792 First Kiss, Last Licks 1990 175.00 Promo-only sampler
- 522647 Alive III 1994 \$30.00 Limited edition black vinyl
- 522647 Alive III 1994 \$30.00 Limited edition blue vinyl
- 522647 Alive III 1994 \$30.00 Limited edition red vinyl
- 522647 Alive III 1994 \$30.00 Limited edition white vinyl
- 528674 Creatures of the Night 1995 \$40.00 Reissue; picture disc of makeup cover
- 528950 MTV Unplugged 1996 \$25.00 First editions are on black vinyl
- 528950 MTV Unplugged 1996 \$60.00 Second editions are on yellow marbled vinyl
- 532741 You Wanted the Best, You Got the Best!! 1996 \$25.00
- 814297 Lick It Up 1983 \$25.00
- 822495 Animalize 1984 \$25.00
- 826099 Asylum 1985 \$25.00
- 832632 Crazy Nights 1987 20.00
- 832903 Crazy Nights 1987 \$30.00
- 836427 Smashes, Thrashes and Hits 1988 20.00
- 836887 Smashes, Thrashes and Hits 1988 \$30.00
- 838913 Hot in the Shade 1989 \$25.00
- 8227801 Alive! 2008 \$30.00

WESTWOOD ONE

- IC-85-02 Kiss/Twisted Sister In Concert 1985 \$200.00

Gene Simmons solo

CASABLANCA

- NBPL 7120 Gene Simmons 1978 \$25.00
- NBPLX 7120 Gene Simmons 1978 \$100.00 Picture disc

Current market value for records in Near Mint condition

10 ALBUMS THAT CHANGED MY LIFE

BY KEN SHARP

Gene Simmons



He's the fire-breathing God of Thunder. To the public at large, KISS' Gene Simmons is the stalking bass-playing monster in dragon boots who howls at the moon. As for his listening habits, based on his dark, vampiric stage character, one would assume that his musical meter leans toward the heaviest of rock. But in reality, Simmons' musical tastes are surprising and varied, as you'll discover. Before we attended to the task at hand, Simmons insisted upon educating us, stressing the importance of roots music as the foundation of rock and roll: "As a preamble, when I first came to America as an eight-and-a-half-year-old boy, this was pre-Beatles. I came to America with my mother in 1958, and I had never heard of rock and roll, and I actually had never seen a television set. We didn't have one. We were very poor in Israel, and I never could have imagined that there was a magic box where people flew through the air and there were monsters and the Empire State Building and King Kong. I never imagined. And the first music I heard in America was Chuck Berry and Little Richard and all that. I actually met Little Richard a few times and took my son Nick to see Little Richard. We went backstage, and he couldn't have been nicer. 'So good to see you' and everything. And he said, 'Who's this young man?' And I said, 'That's my son Nick. Nick, you know, Little Richard, this is a very, very important person.' And Little Richard said to him, 'Young man, rock and roll, I invented it!' (laughs) He went on in his Little Richard way, saying, 'You ain't got no Beatles without me!' (laughs). So as I said, when I first came to America, I first heard Chuck Berry, Little Richard, all that stuff. And in a very strange twist of fate, I did the eulogy for Chuck Berry's funeral at the behest of the Berry family. So as a sidebar, I want to stress the importance of roots. If it wasn't for African Americans, especially men. Of course, there's Big Mama Thornton, but it was the guys, Little Richard, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, these original people who came out of what was known as the chitlin' circuit, who actually started writing their own songs. All these guys who came up out of the blues and started doing this sort of new version of rhythm and blues, which became rock and roll. 'Good Golly Miss Molly' bears little resemblance to blues, although it has those three chords. But it's not blues, it's rock and roll. The melodies are different. Blues usually concerned itself with blues subject matter. My baby is gone and my heart is broken, that kind of thing, and rock and roll was more uplifting. It was fun. 'Roll over Beethoven, tell Tchaikovsky the news' — I urge everybody to go out and check out the roots."



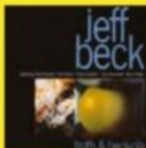
Ray Charles, *Greatest Hits*

You can't get any better than "Hit the Road Jack." It has one repeating, descending bass line. It doesn't have a bridge; it doesn't have a chorus. It only has that riff that keeps going back over and over again, and on top of that is a haunting melody with a give and take in the background. It's just classic. Ray Charles did, in fact, have a country & western album that he recorded that he paid for. He did songs like "I Can't Stop Loving You." He covered country & western songs, "Crying Time" and all that. And his record company said, "You're out of your mind. You're a rhythm & blues artist, 'Georgia (On My Mind)' and 'Hit the Road Jack' and all that. You can't do country & western. That's white people music." And he said, "But I love this music, and I'm going to record it." They said, "Well, you're gonna pay for it," and he did well and those became the biggest albums of his career.



The Beatles, *The Beatles (The White Album)*

The Beatles' "White Album" is one of my favorites because you're seeing turmoil within perhaps the greatest band that ever existed that recorded its own music where each member was a star. But you could hear and feel the disjointed sense of that album, although clearly the songs shined and the playing and the production was terrific. It's interesting that *Abbey Road* perhaps was the greatest Beatles album, and they were breaking up at that point, but somehow that had a more unified thing. But just for crazy out there music, it's gotta be "The White Album."



Jeff Beck Group, *Truth/Beck-Ola*

There was a release pairing *Truth* and *Beck-Ola* together which I bought more than once. Before Led Zeppelin, there was a band called the Jeff Beck Group, and then Jimmy Page heard what Jeff was doing and said, "I got to put a band together," and he formed Led Zeppelin. For me, if I had my druthers, playing the first two Led Zeppelin records or the first two Jeff Beck Group records, it's the Jeff Beck Group, hands down.



Dave Clark Five, *Greatest Hits*

The DC5 were so underrated and so spectacular. It's interesting: They were, in fact, bigger than The Beatles for a short time. They had a movie out. *Catch Us If You Can*, while The Beatles had *A Hard Day's Night*. They were bigger than The Beatles and they had their own sound. The Beatles had the Liverpool sound, and the DC5 had the Tottenham sound. When I first heard their music, I loved it. It had kind of relentless drumming, which, of course, were studio musicians secretly, but terrific production, great singing. I always thought their lead singer, Mike Smith, belonged in The Beatles. He looked right, he played keyboards and had a spectacular voice. Looked great, sounded great. And in fact, Dave Clark called me to be in their documentary because he said he'd always been appreciative of the kind words I'd say about the band. When KISS played Wembley in London, I sat down and started reminiscing about what that group meant to me because music is always more than music. It's the soundtrack of your life, who you were with, what was going on and all that.



Patsy Cline, *Greatest Hits*

Her music hit me like a truck running you over, and the more I read about her, the more fascinated I became. She had a song called "Crazy" and in country & western culture, you couldn't say the word crazy. It was supposed to be vulgar. And here was this janitor by the name of Willie Nelson who wrote "Crazy." By the way, the classic songs, like "Yesterday" or "Michelle" or even the Charlie Chaplin-written song "Smile," start off with the name of the song. Same thing with "Crazy," and that is the sign of great, not just good, but great songwriting. And when I first heard the words in "Crazy," and the fact that it came out of country & western, blew me away. And then I heard all her other tracks. So you can't appreciate music without really appreciating music. Yes, Jeff Beck's riffs and guitar playing, the bombast of Led Zeppelin, but you can't leave Patsy Cline over on the side.



ABBA, *Greatest Hits*

Yes, we like death metal, and yes, I like The Killers and I like Tame Impala — I like all kinds of things. But what is it that rises to a level of greatness no matter the musical genre, it's the ability to craft songs that are forever. I was going to say The Bee Gees, but it pisses off a lot of people, but those songs are undeniable. So if I'm riding in my car and ABBA music comes on, I turn it up and that's the sign of greatness. Undeniable songwriting. You just can't touch it. That's why I have to pick ABBA because it's just undeniable. I could have said The Four Seasons or The Beach Boys because there's a wealth of great material.



Led Zeppelin, *Led Zeppelin*

When I first heard "Communication Breakdown," I thought, Oh, my God, this sounds like hell on four wheels. I thought it was a chick singer. I didn't know it was a guy. I never heard of Robert Plant. I didn't know anything. It's just you turn it up, you say, Oh, what is that? I want to hear that! I mean, the same thing happened to me when I first heard The Beatles. What is that jangly sound and what is that? You want to turn it up! That first Zeppelin record is undeniable. The fact that the band had one guitar player, one bass player and drums and were able to sound like that live, that says a lot. Undeniable. But they were able to reproduce that live just with those guys — instead of The Beatles, you'd need musicians to do *Sgt. Pepper*.



James Brown, *20 All-Time Greatest Hits!*

James Brown came up from nothing in the swamps of Georgia and somehow created himself, educated himself and learned the craft without going to dancing school or music school. It bears noting there was a concert film called *The T.A.M.I. Show*, and it had Jan and Dean, The Rolling Stones and James Brown. I suggest everybody should watch it. James Brown went on right before The Rolling Stones. This is when The Rolling Stones were first coming up. James Brown tore that stage up like nobody. And there's a telling close-up of Mick Jagger offstage watching James Brown nervously biting his nails. And then when the Stones came out, you see Mick Jagger nervously trying to do James Brown. And all that strange dancing that Jagger has been doing ever since is totally the white soulless version of what James Brown did.



The Who, *Tommy*

Albums are full statements, and most bands put out collections of songs. *Tommy* is a great example. That album still stands the test of time. Not only was it made into a movie, but those songs and the performance are clearly extraordinary. Believe me, I know what I'm talking about. We tried to do *The Elder*, we couldn't shine their shoes. *Tommy* is a standalone, not only a concept album, but a collection of songs that all fit, pieces of the puzzle that are from the same puzzle. The first time I saw The Who live? It's a funny story. Bill Aucoin who just came on to manage KISS in late '73, said to myself and Paul, "Hey, we're going to Philly to see The Who, want to come along?" It was the *Quadrophenia* tour. Lynyrd Skynyrd opened. Al Kooper, who discovered them, came from Blood, Sweat and Tears. And we're sitting there and The Who come on and we can't wait. *Quadrophenia*, in my estimation, was a flawed attempt, it was reaching too high. I didn't know what it was. The sound was all mired, and The Who weren't really The Who. They didn't do what we came to see. And I remember Paul and I looked at each other. This is going to be embarrassing because I hold The Who in such high esteem. "We're going to kill them." And that's what you want from new talent. We're pretty good onstage. I want new bands to come and see us and go, "Yeah, pretty good. We'll kill them." That's what every boxer should have in his heart when he steps into the ring with the champion. Otherwise, you're never going to become a champion. The interesting thing about Keith Moon is he couldn't work in any other band. But because you had a band that had one guitar player and one bassist, there was a lot of room for him to be Keith Moon. I mean, imagine Keith Moon in The Beatles? But it also says a lot that if Ringo or John Bonham was in The Who, it would be too plodding. It wouldn't have that soaring effect.



KISS, *Destroyer*

I'd select *Destroyer* as my final pick. Semi-concept album. Some of those songs have survived the test of time. It was a strange period. It was the beginning of the end, really. The band started to fall to pieces way back in '76. The truth is we all like all kinds of music. What's interesting is in the dressing room, we put on all kinds of music. There have been artists who have had those kind of standalone songs and you just go, "Wait a minute." Things like "The Sun Ain't Gonna Shine Anymore" by The Walker Brothers. Undeniable. I love The Raspberries, too.

AN INTERVIEW WITH THE ULTIMATE KISS FAN "FAT VINNY," VINNY GONZALES

BY KEN SHARP

"Fat Vinny," otherwise known as Vinny Gonzales, is notorious in KISS circles, acknowledged as perhaps the ultimate hardcore KISS fan and one who pulled off the impossible and managed to forge a friendship with the band spanning decades. Here's his story.

Tell us about the first time you saw KISS live.

VINNY GONZALES: On December 31, 1973, I saw them at the Academy of Music on a bill with Blue Oyster Cult, Teenage Lust, Iggy Pop and KISS. But I was there to see Blue Oyster Cult play. I didn't know anything about KISS. I had no clue. They came on the stage, and I was like, what the f**k is this? All of a sudden, this band comes out and the bass player breathes fire, and I fell in love with them. I thought they were incredible.

So the next day, I went to JCPenney and I bought the first KISS album and I loved it, I freaked out. I started going to see them play in concert everywhere, places like the Beacon Theatre. It was not enough just listening to the music; I had to meet these f**king guys! In 1975, I first met Paul (Stanley) at the Academy of Music in New York on 14th Street. I had a picture of KISS with me. I would go to every show at the Academy of Music in hopes a band member would show up. Paul looked great. He had friggin hair all the way up and looked amazing. I took a picture of him in '75 with my Nikon, and I was going to get it signed. He liked the picture so much, I go, "You want it?" He goes, "But what am I going to sign for you?" "You could sign a piece of paper for me," so he signed a piece of paper." And that was the beginning.

Then John Harte told me, "Listen, Gene (Simmons) is going to be at the Capitol Theatre in Passaic, New Jersey, to see Angel." Gene pulls up in a big f**king stretch limo and he opens his window and says, "How do you know I was going to be here?" And like an idiot, I said, "John Harte told me," and he goes, "Do me a favor. Tell John he's fired." But he was kidding.

You see, John Harte, their head of security, took a liking to me. He would call me up and say, "Vinny, we're flying out of Kennedy and we're going to be here at three o'clock on this airline," so I'd get there, and the band would be there and I'd get their autographs. I remember when they played in Australia, they flew back into New York at three or four o'clock in the morning on a flight, and I was there and Gene started freaking out in a humorous way going, "How the f**k do you know where we are now?" (laughs) John would tell me, "We're gonna be at SIR Studio rehearsing Monday to Friday, come on down," and then I'd get to hang out with the band.

Out of all the KISS fans, why do you think the band embraced you and forged a deep personal relationship?

VG: Well, because they would see me everywhere, rehearsal studios, backstage, photo sessions with new costumes; I was there all the time. And then they used start getting to the point where the band would bet on it, if I'd show up someplace. John would tell me when they were coming back from England, and I'd be at the airport, and that was all thanks to John Harte. He just took a liking to me and gave me my first "lamos," laminates. In the '70s, John would bring me into the rehearsal studio, and I would sit there and watch them do the whole entire show, rehearsing

constantly. And then it got to the point where Paul and the rest of the band would say, "Come on in," so I didn't have to wait out there anymore.

At what point were you getting backstage passes to meet KISS?

VG: I got backstage for the first time at the Calderone Theater in 1975. I saw KISS when they played two shows at the Beacon Theatre with Jo Jo Gunne. I was 15, 16 years old. KISS' manager, Bill Aucoin, was a great guy and he liked me. He said, "We're playing the Calderone. If you want to come up, I'll put you on the list and you're going to be able to get backstage." So we get there, they gave me the passes and tickets, and we walked in the back and me and my friend just stood there like zombies. A little while later, we heard them soundchecking and we watched them, and they were playing without makeup, and we started to figure out who was who: "There's Gene, there's Paul, there's Ace (Frehley), and there's Peter (Criss)." I used to be scared of Peter and Ace. I was a kid. They were in their late 20s and I was 16. That was a big deal.

Did you attend any recording sessions?

VG: Yes, I was in the studio, situated right by Mannys Music, when Paul sang "Heaven's on Fire." I was at rehearsals for one of their '70s tours, and Gene told me to come up and sing, so I started singing "Love Gun" while they were playing. That was amazing. Also, I was in the rehearsal studio when Diana Ross would come because Gene was going out with her. So I'd be sitting there while KISS was playing Supremes songs while Diana Ross was singing. It really got f**king grand. And then that was it. They either had to let me into their inner sanctum or get an order of protection against me. (laughs)

You would bring them delicious Italian food that your mother, Nancy, would make, and some of the band members would visit you at home and have dinner with you and your mother.

VG: Peter and his then-wife, Debbie, would come here all the time and sleep here. Peter was recording his first solo album out of the band. It was snowing. It was a f**king blizzard. And here I am standing in this little doorway from four in the afternoon, and now it's two in the morning and it's bad out. John Harte comes down and he's like, "Hey Vinny, you need to go home. Peter's not going to be out for a long time." I said, "Yeah, but I gotta meet him. I want to get him to sign some stuff for me." He goes upstairs and he tells Peter, "Listen, there's this crazy guy outside that he follows you all over the place. He really wants to meet you." Peter found out I was Italian and said to him, "Tell him if his mother makes me bracciale and lasagna tomorrow, I'll let them come up and meet me in the studio." So I went home. I wake my mom up and said, "You've got to make f**king lasagna, meatballs and sausage and bracciale for Peter Criss tomorrow, because he invited me up into the studio to watch him record." So she got up early and she made it for me. I go back the next day, and John Harte tells Peter I'm here with the food. And he goes, "Get out of here! Well, I told him he could come up if he brings food, so bring him up." It was him, John Belushi and Steve Stevens. So I got to hang out with Peter and Belushi. I got him to sign a bunch of stuff. Peter loved the food, all



Gene Simmons visits Vinny at his home.

of them loved it, and then I was going back every day waiting for autographs. So one day I said, "Peter, I'd love for you to come to my house; my mother would really make you an incredible dinner." So I got Peter and Debbie to come, and we had a great f**king time. Debbie was a model and she had to go on business to California, and I stayed over Peter's house in Connecticut, and we rented movies and we hung out. And that's how I started to get close with them. I did the same thing with Gene, who came out for dinner. It was after they played the Meadowlands with White Lion. And he showed up by himself in a limo. He got here at about eight o'clock at night. We had dinner, we hung out, he came down into my basement with all my KISS stuff and freaked out over all the sh*t I had, and we became really good friends. I mean, I couldn't believe it. Then I would be waiting outside when they were recording or rehearsing, and Paul would say, "You don't have to wait outside anymore."

At some point the members of KISS started giving you priceless KISS-related items.

VG: That's right. Gene gave me his first Axe bass that he used on the whole Australian tour. It had all the blood on it, and the f**king guitar strap with all the studs on it. He gave me that in the case. I was like, "Holy sh*t!" Paul gave me the prototype, the first one ever made, of his 1977 Ibanez guitar with his name engraved in the ivory with a guitar strap. Then they started giving me all their clothes. And then I had like 40 gold and platinum albums all in my name: the first album, *Hotter Than Hell*, *Dressed to Kill*, *Alive!*, *Love Gun*, *Destroyer*, the solo albums, everything!

Fill us in about your relationship with Robert De Niro and how your love of KISS squelched a work opportunity with the famous actor.

VG: I met Robert De Niro, and he happened to like me. I don't know why, but we became pretty good friends. I was told by a friend not to go up to him at his house because he's not a nice guy. I went to his hotel, and I waited 13 hours for a f**king autograph. Finally, at three in the morning, I was just about ready to leave and his town car pulls up in front of mine. He was living at the Mayflower Hotel. He gets out of the car and I said, "Mr. De Niro, please, don't say no." He couldn't get a word in. I said, "I've been waiting for you for 13 hours to get an autograph; you can't say no!" So he's like, "I'll sign one for you." So he signs the one, and



Paul Stanley with Vinny and his mother, Nancy.

I started telling him jokes. So he keeps going. I had like eight or nine things with me to be signed. So he keeps signing and signing while I'm telling him jokes. And he goes, "Are we done?" And I said, "Well, my friend in the car has got stuff." He goes, "Get your friend out," and he signed all my friend's stuff.

So I said, "Thank you, Mr. De Niro." It was a really cold November day, so I got in my car and started to warm it up because it was sitting there all day and it was freezing out. He comes walking back out of the hotel with a piece of paper, and I go, "Oh no. He's probably going to take my f**king license plate down." He comes up to the car, and my window is up, and he's standing there and my friend goes, "Will you roll your f**king window down?" So I roll the window down and I go, "Yes, Mr. De Niro," and he says, "Can I talk to you for a second?" And I said, "Yes, sure." He goes, "Could you get out of the car?" So I shut the car off and I get out of the car. I was thinking, I'm going to get arrested or I thought he was going to say, "Don't ever come back here again." Anyway, he goes, "Listen, I'm going to be doing a movie soon called *The King of Comedy*. It's about autograph collectors, and I think you would be great to be in my movie." I was like, "Get out of here!" I said to my friend Tommy, "Do you hear him? He's telling me he wants to put me in his movie." He goes, "Could you give me your name and number?" And he goes, "Listen, I'm almost done with the story. I'm going to call you Wednesday, and I'll tell you when to come in. I want you to meet Martin Scorsese." I didn't know who he was at the time. (laughs)

I worked at Looney Tunes, a record store in Long Island, and they knew I collected autographs, and I was telling them I was going for De Niro. So the next day I go into work and tell everyone I met De Niro and he wants to put me in a movie. And my boss is like, "Vinny, that's what he said because he probably wanted to get rid of you." Wednesday comes, no call. Thursday comes, no call. I'm like, Wow, he did really blow me off. Then it's Friday and I'm in the back room stacking albums, and the phone rings in the back and my manager picked up the phone and said (excitedly), "Vinny, De Niro is on the phone!" I pick up the phone and he goes, "Vinny, it's me, Bob. I hope I didn't get you in trouble at work." I said, "In trouble? They're all passing out that you just called." And he goes, "I'm sorry I didn't call you Wednesday. I had to go to California for a day, and I got home late Thursday night, so I'm calling you now. Are we still on



Vinny at his home with Robert De Niro.

for Sunday?" And I said, "Yeah."

So I met with him and Martin Scorsese, and they put me in the movie. And then he said, "Listen, is it possible I come out to your house and hang out with you?" and we became really great friends. He was at my house eating dinner, and he asked me if I wanted to work for him. And I said, "I can't work for you. KISS is going back on tour, and in fact, I have to leave right now." It was a show on the *Dynasty* tour at the Garden. I brought Joe Pesci and his daughter to the show. His daughter was a big KISS fan. I also took him and his daughter to the filming of the unreleased KISS video for "I," me and my friend Nicky have Ace on our shoulders. Pesci and his daughter stayed all day and loved it.

In the film *The King of Comedy*, if you put on the film from the very beginning, you see a crowd, and then you hear my voice first and you see De Niro walking to me, and we start talking about autographs. I'm only in it for a second. It's not like Vinny Gonzales movie (laughs) but, yeah, he put me in the movie. He paid for my SAG dues and got me in the Screen Actors Guild, and I'm still friends with him today.

What did De Niro think of your KISS collection?

VG: He freaked out. He went, "Jesus Christ!" We were upstairs for a while, and I asked him if he wanted to come and see the basement. When he saw my KISS collection, he couldn't believe it. They even used my chairs in my rooms to film the movie. De Niro stayed at my house for over a month just to learn about just the collecting situation. I didn't know he was watching me to see how I was, studying me, in other words. His assistant said he based the movie, his character, on you, and I said, "I'm not that f**king crazy like that in the movie." (laughs) She said, "Like when you yell upstairs to your mother and everything, 'Leave me alone. I'm busy!'"

Tell us about KISS' show on November 20, 1984, at Mid-Hudson Civic Center in Poughkeepsie, New York, when they celebrated your 100th KISS show.

VG: It was one of the only shows Mark St. John played at. I think Bruce Kulick did half the show, and he did the other half of the show. I'm watching the show, and this time I was standing on the side of the stage. At the end of the show, Paul says, "We never do this. We never bring anybody onstage. But we got a good

friend of ours tonight here." And I'm looking and watching them from the side. He said, "Today is his 100th show," and right away, I almost swallowed my tongue. And he goes, "And his name is Vinny, we're going to bring him out. I want you to give him a hand." So Paul comes straight over to me, and I said, "I can't do it, Paul. I can't walk out there. Please, Paul." He goes, "Vinny, I just announced you. I've got to bring you out there." John Harte goes, "Get out there!" So Paul walks me out to the middle of the stage, and everybody's clapping and taking pictures. I was sh*tting myself. And he's like, "Let's hear it for Vinny! We're going to dedicate this song 'Rock and Roll All Nite' to Vinny!" They grabbed my hand and I bowed with them, and I went to turn around after the first bow, and that's when all hell broke loose and they hit me with pies and f**king champagne. All of them. They were falling and slipping all over the stage because the pie was all over the stage. (laughs) And then I had to go into Paul's room and take a shower. It was a blizzard out there, and I had no other clothes with me. I had to get a shirt. They had to give me something to wear because I had no clothes with me. I didn't know they were going to do this to me. I would go to all their parties after the big shows in New York. I also remember once I was backstage at a show on the *Creatures* tour in like, f**king Iowa, and me and Paul were Hula-hoop dancing. They were always so great to me. They did everything for me. They let me into their world.

Decades on, you have maintained your friendship with Paul, Gene, Ace and Peter.

VG: Yes, the whole band has always been incredible to me. I don't know why. Like when my mom just passed away, the phone rang and my TV said "private number," and I picked up the phone and said, "Hello?" And he's like, "Vinny." And I said, "Yeah, who's this?" And he goes, "It's Paul." And I swear to God, I go, "Paul who?" And he goes, "Does any other Paul really matter?" (laughs) That's exactly what he said to me. And he goes, "I'm calling you about your mother." And he said a beautiful thing to me, "Vinny, your mother will never pass. Your mother will never die because you'll keep her in your heart. We loved your mother." And I was crying, and he was trying to calm me down. He was like, "You've got a lot of friends." I go, "Paul, I got a lot of f**king friends because I know you," and he was so nice. "Well, we love you, Vinny. I'm going to keep calling and checking up on you." That right there shows you the kind of great guy he and the rest of the band are. They were always very loyal and treated me kind.

Many years later, I remember when me and my wife went to Indiana or Ohio to see KISS. It was the first day of the tour. I go walking in the building, and I knew everybody on the road crew there except their new head of security. I saw Beth, their wardrobe girl and said hello to her, and then the security guy comes walking up to me real quick and says, "You can't wait here!" I said, "No, it's OK, I'm waiting for Gene and Paul; they know me." He goes, "This is my f**king building; you can't wait in here." So while that's happening, Beth comes over and tried to tell him it's OK, he's really good friends with Gene and Paul. He walked away for a second, and Paul and Gene come in with their suitcases on them. I go, "Hi, Paul and Gene. Listen, this guy wants to kick me out of the building. He said that I can't stay here. This is his building." Paul went, "You go get him a laminated pass right now." He took the pass off of him and put it on my shirt and said, "If he wants to stand on your feet for the show, he can stand on your feet." (laughs)



WELCOME TO KISS World!

**AN INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTINA VITAGLIANO,
CO-OWNER OF GENE SIMMONS KISS WORLD**

BY KEN SHARP

For the past 50 years, KISS co-founder Gene Simmons has built his career adhering to a “larger than life” world view on all things KISS. For Christina Vitagliano, co-owner of the newly launched Gene Simmons KISS World at The Rio in Las Vegas with husband Patrick, she’s a tireless and trusted ally in charge of preserving Sim-

mons’ legacy to the legions of KISS Army foot soldiers. We spoke with Vitagliano who provided for the inside scoop about this exciting new venture.

GOLDMINE: What sparked the idea behind Gene’s KISS Museum?

CHRISTINA VITAGLIANO: I think

when Gene sold his house in Beverly Hills and moved to a different home, by the time he bought another home with his wife, Shannon, it occurred to him that his amazing KISS collection should be seen by the public. Instead of putting it in a new house, he said, “Well, I can build another building so I can look at it

CHRISTINA VITAGLIANO

every day, but why can't the fans see this? I want the fans to see what I built." So that's how it started. Patrick and I own the KISS minigolf, which is now going to be called Gene Simmons KISS World at the Rio. That also encompasses his KISS Museum.

GM: *Gene has described himself as the world's greatest Gene Simmons hoarder. In your case, with the museum, that's a good thing.*

CV: Well, it's a weird thing. Once we got the collection and it was all in boxes, it was five or six tractor-trailer trucks full of Gene's collection. Much of it was stored in its own warehouse. When we were bringing one truck in, we started to unpack and put the display cases together. This was months ago now, and so we get to end of the day, and I thought it was truly amazing, and I'm not a KISS collector. I'm not a KISS super fan. That's just not who I am. But it blew me away when I started looking at all this stuff because this is somebody who had the foresight 50 years ago to say to himself, "I am going to keep and collect every single thing that has anything to do with KISS." He started collecting stuff from day one. Who has ever done that? So I got to the end of the day and I called Gene and I said, "I've got to tell you, I don't think anybody has ever done what you did here. I don't even know if you realize how amazing this is," and I continue to keep unboxing things from his collection.

GM: *I've interviewed Gene quite a few times at his home and saw the large collection he proudly displayed in his office, but that's just a small part of his collection, correct?*

CV: Yes. This stuff that has either come out of his attic or came out of who knows. I found things like his actual high school graduation diploma.

GM: *So beyond the KISS items, there are many one-of-a-kind personal items like that that are part of his legacy. Give me some highlights.*

CV: We have the cake topper from Gene and Shannon's wedding, which I think is adorable. There's a lot of Gene personal items, a lot of Gene's handwritten notes, artwork, handwritten lyrics — a ton of cool stuff. And the collection in the museum will be evolving and ever-changing

because you need a football field-sized building to display all this stuff. It's just crazy. You can put a lot of items in these display cabinets and you can do the best you can, but you're still hiding something. A lot of these items are flat items like original letters and notes from this person or that person. But I'm continually surprised what I'm finding when I open each box. I've only been working with Gene. I'll open a box and find something that a fan gave him 10 years ago, and he has it. So he has every fan gift any fan ever handed to this guy. These fans are going to be blown away when they look at showcase of items, many will undoubtedly say, "Oh my God, he kept that?"

GM: *What are some of the KISS-centric highlights of what will be in the museum?*

CV: There's early stuff from the '70s, things like the original negatives from those tours — I mean, tons of stuff like that. Gene has lyrics written down on things. There's some of the original art boards for ads. It's endless. I think if I'm blown away by something like this, fans who have lived with KISS for decade after decade, they're going to come in here and we're going to lose them for a day. (laughs) We still have KISS minigolf, the arcade and the wedding chapel, but the entire back portion of our venue now, which was our event room, is now his collection.

GM: *Has Gene offered a vision of how he's wanting this to be presented, or has he left it up to you and Patrick?*

CV: No matter what I do, whether Gene says, "Go ahead and do whatever you want," I always communicate with him and keep him in the loop because I'll look at something and say, I think it looks good but what would Gene think? We'll work for an entire weekend in here, and

I'll send him a video, and I narrate the video saying, "This is where we're at here, what's your opinion?" He's been very hands on. He always is. That's my favorite thing about working with him. The communication is just impeccable. If you're a KISS fan, you absolutely have to see this because you will be blown away. It'll give you goosebumps. I'm speechless at what



I'm looking at, and I've been looking at it for two months, but every single day when we come in you open another box and I'm like, are you serious? Who would keep this? Who would have this? The dedication that he has to his own band, his own brand and to the fans, there's no words for it.

Launching ShopGeneSimmons.com

The Demon launches a site to die for, especially if you are a KISS fan

GOLDMINE: What led to the launching of shopgenesimmons.com?

GENE SIMMONS: Well, a long time ago, as a matter of fact, the last century, the band started to put out jewelry, all kinds of stuff — charm bracelets, rings, featuring our trademarked logo. One of the things that I started to do, because I'm a wiseass, is I started to put the dollar sign instead of just a regular S but two strikes through it, and I was able to trademark that so my signature is actually trademarked. And so the jewelry came out. And once I had the trademark for the S as a dollar sign in my name, led me to wonder about whether or not I could trademark the money bag logo, which is a dollar sign inside the bag and surprisingly, the U.S. government gave me the rights. I drew the money bag logo, and then I tried to trademark it around the world, and it was accepted everywhere.

So along the way, I started using the money bag logo on my publishing venture; Simmons Books had the money bag logo and Simmons Comics. We had three different comic books that came out monthly that used that, clothing, all kinds of stuff. And the reason that's important is because it helps the trademark actually have life and vibrancy by following the rules of interstate commerce, which means you can have a trademark. But if you don't do business outside your state, the trademark isn't as strong. So because my books and magazines and other stuff was available around the world, it helped the money bag logo get trademark approval around the world.

About two years back through the epidemic, I started wondering, what else would I put inside that money bag? So as it happens, I'm the only person on Earth that owns the Euro, the "E" with the two slashes. That's the monetary logo for the Euro inside the money bag as approved by the European Union. That goes for the English pound. I'm the only person on Earth that owns the English pound logo so long as it's in the money bag. I own the Japanese yen and the Chinese yuan. I also own a bit of the Statue of Liberty; I actually own the trademark to that so long as I don't use the torch. If you notice my hand gesture, which in sign language means I love you, which I've been doing for 40 or so years. I copyrighted the ascent of man in the money bag logo, too, which is a skeletal representation of evolution with the last one being a skeleton of me with my tongue out and my hand gesture playing a bass. There are a few other kind of variations, including the siren logo that was supposed to be used when I was doing marketing for McLaren, a car company. So shopgenesimmons.com isn't what you would expect. This isn't just T-shirts and hats.

I'm going to be offering bulletproof backpacks with our logos because it's a crazy world.

GM: And you'll continue to create more products?

GS: Yes. I've done no advertising, no interviews. In fact, this is the first time I'm speaking about it. I just launched it.

GM: Thinking outside of the box for the future for the website, what are some of the other things that you're looking to showcase?

GS: Almost anything out there that is part of life. T-shirts and hats are the usual ones that guys mostly have, like wearing logos or signs or phrases. Women, on the other hand, swear almost like a religion by Gucci and all the other things they buy based on brand names, so there's no limit.

GM: And you will continue to acquire new visual trademarks?

GS: That's exactly right. Upcoming is a money bag NFT. It's going to be money bag U, which is Moneybag University; people are going to be hearing about that soon. There's already a money bag soda that's available across North America in most grocery stores and chains. There's also moneybag vodka. There's no limitation on what can be done now but it's clearly non-KISS.

GM: Will the site showcase your artwork?

GS: I may do a series of logos. For instance, I'm the only one that can do the American flag and instead of the 50 stars, if I put in 50 money bags, I would actually own that version of the flag.

GM: I was impressed with the artwork that you were doing during the pandemic. Once you threw yourself into that, did it feel like an awakening?

GS: Maybe it's a part of my DNA. When I do something, if I'm interested in it, I dive headlong. So the pandemic gave me a chance to study up on crypto currencies, and I invested heavily on that and take up art, although I've never done any of it. But they both worked out tremendously.

GM: Following up this new website will be genesimmonsauctions.com and Gene Simmons KISS World in Las Vegas.

GS: Genesimmonsauctions.com is really a way for the fans to get a hold of a lot of my stuff. Did you ever see the TV show *Hoarders*, where these sad people just find it impossible to throw away anything, so literally their homes are filled from floor to ceiling with God knows what? If they go

to McDonald's to eat, they leave the sandwich with the wrapper and everything else is left in the living room and it piles up. So I'm sort of a Gene Simmons hoarder. I'm surprised I've thrown away the toilet paper I wiped my ass with because I kept everything. And over time, like many things, the value of things you thought were unimportant goes up. That also means Pokémon cards or those McDonald's toys that you get for going in and having a hamburger. Over time, they become collectible. And that means valuable because everything is a piece of the past. So for people who are interested in Gene Simmons or KISS, they'll be able to find lots of stuff there that otherwise would not be available anywhere else. The Gene Simmons KISS World is now in the midst of opening at the Rio hotel in Las Vegas. It's basically my collection, everything from my high school graduation diploma to all the toys and games and that kind of stuff and one-of-a-kind personal items.

GM: Is there an item that holds the most personal significance to you here?

GS: Maybe one of the first hand-drawn KISS concert posters. Both of these were hand drawn literally with a ruler when we were nobody and just had big dreams on the streets of New York, and we launched the new band called KISS. This was the beginning, when we had big dreams and wanted to put together the band we never saw onstage. I suppose that has more sentimental value than the other stuff.

GM: So the big question is, is your wife Shannon really happy now that all of your collectibles are gone from your home?

GS: Yes. (laughs) That goes for any Star Wars fan or action-figure fan or (fan of) anything else. Your beloved, the girl you share the space with, isn't happy. She likes furniture and clothing; of course, if you go into her closet, there are hundreds of pairs of shoes, some of which she won't wear ever but, well, that's a different story.

GM: Was it tough for you to get rid of the stuff?

GS: That's a good question. And maybe it's a combination, yes or no. Sad to see it go from my place, but happy that the fans are actually going to be able to see it because what's anything you do if you can't share it with people and let them see it and enjoy it. It's like painters: I guess if you paint a painting, I guess you could do it just for yourself, and you're hanging in your living room. But of course, you get more pleasure when somebody comes and visits you and says, "Oh, that's a nice painting." "Oh, you really like it? I did it."

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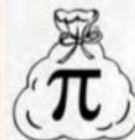
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[GENE SIMMONS | FROM PAGE 50]

please write the lyrics so we can finish it." And every time he'd say (imitates Dylan's voice), "No, Mr. Kiss, you write it." I said, "I can't write the lyrics. You're Bob Dylan, the preeminent lyricist!" So finally when the solo record came nearer and nearer, I literally wrote the lyrics as the track was being recorded.

GM: *Lastly, the level of KISS fandom is akin to the deep mad love fans have for The Beatles, and there's uber hard-core KISS fans around the world. Perhaps the most celebrated KISS uber fan in the '70s was the guy that everyone in the band forged a relationship with. You guys even visited his house. Let me test you, what's the name of the person I'm speaking about?*

GS: Fat Vinny.

GM: *Yes, Fat Vinny — Vinny Gonzales. Tell us about Vinny. You guys connected with him deeply, gave him instruments, priceless one-of-a-kind memorabilia. You would visit his house. What was the connection?*

GS: He is a fan, and he's been a fan a long time. He used to wait anywhere where we were. Somehow he'd find out and he was there. "Oh, please sign. Mr. Simmons, could you please sign this?" with his New York Italian accent. "Could you please sign over there and sign that?" I'd say, "Sure." He was always very kind. A few years later, we kept seeing him. We're going to New York; I guess we're going to see Vinny, and then he started showing up in Connecticut and other places. There he is, Vinny. And it was only later when I saw a movie called *King of Comedy*, which was directed by Martin Scorsese and starred Robert De Niro. I found out that the character in the film, Rupert Pupkin, was based on Vinny Gonzales. Wait a minute: Robert De Niro based his character of a crazy fan on Vinny Gonzales? And that's actually what happened. Vinny loved De Niro, who doesn't? And he would show up anywhere De Niro was, and De Niro took a liking to him, and Scorsese and De Niro went out to his mother's house, way out in Long Island someplace, and they'd have cannolis and talk and then they'd go to the basement and Vinny would show them his KISS memorabilia. They'd say, "What's all this about KISS?" And he said, "Oh yeah, I love those guys." And they'd go, "Oh yeah, why?" and he would explain. And De Niro kept coming over for dinner,

Gene with his mother,
Florence Klein, on KISS'
Alive II tour.



and then when they started filming the movie, De Niro said to Vinny, "I'm going to offer you a job. You're going to be my assistant, you'll drive my car and all that, and you start tomorrow." Vinny actually said to DeNiro, "I can't do that," and he goes, "Why? What do you mean you can't do that? Do you have a job?" "Yeah, I work here and there." Then De Niro said, "So why can't you do that?" Vinny said, "Well, KISS is going out on tour, and I want to be there and go backstage and get their autographs." (laughs)

GM: *There are photos Vinny has posted through the years on Facebook where you're at his house having dinner or Peter's there. How did that happen?*

GS: He'd invite us. There was something about his personality, unlike other fans. Because it was so much just a slice of life at home. People put on airs. I do. Maybe you do and some other people. He was like, "Hey, my Italian mom is cooking a home cooked Italian meal, you wanna come?" ●